

**AMHERST** *Massachusetts***COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT COMMITTEE**

**COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT COMMITTEE (CPAC)
REPORT TO FALL SPECIAL TOWN MEETING NOVEMBER 2012
ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2013**

The Community Preservation Act Committee is pleased to present this report to Fall Town Meeting.

At the Annual Town Meeting there was \$532,834 recommended, approved and voted. In addition there was \$200,000 voted to a budgeted reserve for projects such as these. These three projects were brought to CPAC in September 2012, which were recommended as additions to the FY2013 funding year. These three projects are all contingent on receiving grant funding. The opportunity to match grant funds with local CPA dollars makes these very compelling proposals.

	Article 8 Community Preservation Act Proposals		
	A. Ricci Land	B. Brunelle Land	North Common
CPA	151,500.00	81,500.00	158,672.00
GRANT	353,500.00	81,500.00	370,235.00
	505,000.00	163,000.00	528,907.00
Town CPA Match	30%	50%	30%

ARTICLE 8.**Community Preservation Act – Open Space Acquisition**

**A. RICCI PROPERTY, \$151,500 (from CPA Budgeted Reserve) (CPAC Vote 6-0-0)
(Conservation Commission voted 6-0-0)**

Purpose of Acquisition

For years the Town of Amherst has worked with landowners, state agencies, land trusts, and the towns of Granby, Hadley, Belchertown and South Hadley to preserve the Mt. Holyoke Range, much of which is now the Mount Holyoke Range State Park, operated by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. The park is known for miles of beautiful trails, scenic vistas, and habitat for many common and uncommon animals and plants. Significant parcels still remain vulnerable to development, including the 20 acres of open space on the Ricci Property.

Located on the southerly side of 615 Bay Road, the Ricci property is one of the few large unprotected parcels along the Holyoke Range. The northern half of the property is

open field that transitions to a forested hillside on the southern portion. State and Town owned conservation land directly abuts the property to the south and east, respectively, while much of its land area is considered prime and priority habitat for rare and endangered species. The Baby Carriage Brook, a major local tributary of the Fort River, flows through the southeast corner of the property and then runs parallel just east of the parcel boundary. Due the steep topography on the southern portion of the property, it is highly visible from Bay Road and many other locations in Amherst, such that its permanent preservation will not only protect habitat and water resources, it will preserve the forested and agricultural view sheds.

Description of Property

The Ricci property is comprised of nearly 22 acres. The Town would purchase approximately 20 acres for conservation purposes and exclude 2 acres that would encompass the house and all outbuildings. The 20-acre site proposed for conservation has 384 feet of frontage along Bay Road—a paved town road with electricity, telephone and municipal water. Bay Road is also a designated scenic road, protected under MGL Ch. 40 Sec. 15C. This designation has helped Bay Road maintain its agricultural, rural character by preventing egregious removal of shade trees or stone walls within the public way.

Bay Road was also part of the Native American trail systems, linking seasonal settlements west to the Connecticut River and east to other settlements and hunting grounds. In 1716, the Hadley settlers established a roadway system directly over this trail, enabling settlers to begin moving into the area. Although there were no permanent settlements in Amherst until the 18th Century, the Bay Road Corridor is a major area for archeological importance. The residence on the property has been inventoried with the Massachusetts Historical Commission (AMH.579) as the Charles Goodalls House ca. 1870. Mr. Goodall was a Civil War veteran and owner of the woodworking mill in Nuttingville nearby on Bay Road.

The north half of the property is cleared, consisting of a former apple orchard. Most of the trees have been removed so that the area is mowed. It remains relatively level a few hundred feet back from the road and then begins to slope upward; this is the base of the slope of the Holyoke Range. The field extends up the slope to the forest edge, at which point there are almost 180 degree panoramic views to the north and northeast. Beyond the forest edge to the south the property becomes ever steeper and remains forested.

Conservation Context

The most distinguishing geological feature in Amherst is the Holyoke Mountain Range on the Town's southern border. The Massachusetts Scenic Landscape Inventory describes the surrounding area as follows,

"The Pioneer Valley covers the largest area of relatively unspoiled scenery in the Commonwealth. The valley contains large expanses of flat farmland, dotted with old tobacco barns in an east-west orientation. The steep-sided hills, such as North and South Sugarloaf mountains, Mount Toby, Mount Warner, and the Mount Holyoke Range, all afford impressive views of this productive landscape from above. This area probably contains more vestiges of the 18th century landscape than anywhere else in

the Commonwealth.”

Amherst and its surrounding communities are fortunate to have remained relatively unspoiled and have rolling farmland still in production, all of which contributes a great deal to its scenic qualities. The Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan (ORSP) emphasize the importance of protecting view sheds in the community, especially those along the Holyoke Range.

The OSRP also notes that the Mount Holyoke Range is one of the largest blocks of continuous forest in Amherst (more than 1,000 acres adjoining an additional 5,000 acres in the three adjacent towns). The uninterrupted forest cover provides a significant corridor for wildlife migration, including migratory birds. The Ricci property, included in this corridor, has many attributes that are identified by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program: priority habitats of rare species, biomap 1 core habitat, scenic landscape, and nearly 75 percent of the property designated as Biomap 2 Critical Natural Landscape.

Proposed Uses

The Town proposes to purchase the property for conservation purposes, allowing passive, informal recreation in the form of walking/hiking trails and a scenic overlook with the possibility of interpretive material to describe the historic land uses and settlement patterns of Bay Road.

The Town is proposing to install a gravel parking area on the property's frontage along Bay Road that will direct users to an existing farm road that heads southerly through the property to the higher elevations. The trail will culminate in a scenic overlook area that can be used for picnicking and bird watching. There is a possibility to extend a connecting trail to Baby Carriage Brook to the east, however, this involves a stream crossing and navigation of topography.

Level of Development/Threat to the Property

The property is in an estate owned by two members of the Ricci family who do not reside on the property or live in Amherst. Although the family has committed the property to conservation, the relatively robust housing market in town is an enticing option for any owner of a large parcel, especially when it is in a highly desirable residential area. As the appraisal indicates, there is ample frontage and acreage to develop four single-family house lots from the Ricci property. With municipal water on the street and sewer within 300' of the property, it is a concern of the Town that as the market demand for home sites and housing increases, the owners will seek to develop the property. The adjacent properties to the west succumbed to a similar fate in the early 1980's as a larger property was subdivided into two large single-family house lots.

Project Schedule

The purchase of the Ricci property will rely on Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds to be voted at the Special Town Meeting in November 2012. The Town will continue to work with the owners to coordinate an expedient purchase, expected to be completed in January or February 2013.

After purchasing the property, the Town will need to complete the baseline

documentation and installation of the parking and picnic area. Depending on the weather and site conditions, these tasks may not be completed until May 1, 2013.

B. BRUNELLE PROPERTY, \$81,500 (\$48,500 from CPA Budgeted Reserve and \$33,000 from CPA Fund Balance) (CPAC Vote 6-0-0) (Conservation Commission Vote 6-0-0)

Purpose of Acquisition: Through a state program only available to land trusts, the Kestrel Land Trust is partnering with the Town of Amherst to purchase 16 acres of woodland, wetlands, and open field as an addition to the adjacent Plum Brook Conservation Area. This local acquisition would enhance the conservation and recreation values of this local municipal conservation area. This is phase one of a two-part project to purchase the entire 26 acres owned by the Brunelle Family. The family's elderly matriarch seeks to leave a legacy by conserving what remains of their family farm. In the second phase, the Town of Amherst would use CPA Funds and other grants to purchase and conserve the remaining 10-acre field.

Natural Characteristics and Ecological Values: The Brunelle's entire 26-acre property, which the Town of Amherst and Kestrel Land Trust seek to conserve, contains woodlands, wetlands, and a hayfield. It is bounded to the west by Muddy Brook. The 16-acre portion in Lot 2, the subject of this proposal, includes low-lying wet woodlands and a portion of the field, which flow into Plum Brook. The entire parcel is recognized by BioMap2 as Core Habitat and as Living Waters Critical Supporting Landscape. The property is adjacent to the Plum Brook Conservation Area and would link a corridor of conserved land from Mount Holyoke Range State Park to the Norwottuck Rail Trail. This project also serves larger regional conservation interests by protecting land along these two tributaries to the Fort River. The Fort River watershed connects the towns of Pelham, Amherst, and Hadley, and it is a primary area of focus for the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. The Fort River also contains the Dwarf Wedgemussel, which is a federally endangered species protected by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Agriculture Potential: The agricultural field, which is partially included in phase I of this project, and entirely in phase II, is comprised of Amostown fine sandy loam, which is classified as prime farmland. The Town of Amherst intends to maintain the field for haying, and has developed an agricultural leasing program designed to protect the sensitive ecological values, including wetlands, by limiting agricultural use to farmers who use sustainable best practices.

Recreation Opportunities: This land will offer passive recreational opportunities and will not be used for active sports fields. The property includes a portion of one of Amherst's major long-distance trails —the KC Trail, which is named after Ken Cuddeback, an avid outdoorsman who chaired the Amherst Conservation Commission. The KC Trail is a six-mile footpath running from Old Farm Road near Route 9 in Amherst to Rattlesnake Knob on the Holyoke Range. Purchasing this land would guarantee public access for this portion of the trail along to the Plum Brook Conservation Area in South Amherst. From the woodland, one can view the Mount Holyoke Range, attributing sought after scenic values for those seeking outstanding

opportunities for walking and hiking.

Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP): The Town of Amherst's OSRP identifies thirteen unique areas that help define the character of Amherst, including the "Fort River Corridor, including Muddy Plum and Hop Brooks," where this property is located.

Amherst is tremendously diverse in its flora, landscapes, wildlife, and land use. Open space in the form of conservation land and farmland helps maintain that diversity in the face of mounting development pressures. Public conservation land also serves as an important amenity for those who do not have sufficient private land of their own on which to recreate and directly experience the outdoors.

The Town of Amherst is committed to protecting more land, which will help to preserve the community's open space and recreational opportunities even as new growth occurs. The Conservation Commission, with help from various town staff and departments, and through a valuable public input process, has determined the following to be Amherst's most urgent resource protection needs:

- To expand large blocks of existing preserved lands
- To make an interconnected trail system through innovative land use policies and zoning
- To acquire property for the protection of wetlands, the Town's drinking water supply, and to provide areas for the flood storage; and
- To manage Town land and facilities to maximize their value for wildlife habitat, recreation, scenery, natural resource preservation, and the enhancement of the Town's appearance.
- To support the local farming community

This project meets all of Amherst's Open Space and Recreation Plan goals.

C. NORTH COMMON PROJECT, \$158,672 (\$15,000 CPA Fund Balance and \$143,672 debt authorization) (CPAC Vote 6-0-0) (LSSE Commission Vote 5-0-0)(Historical Commission Vote 4-0-0)

Description and History of North Common

Amherst has three Town Commons located within the more densely settled areas of the Town Center, East Village, and South Amherst Village Center that were formally recognized and dedicated as commons in 1788 from land in the old highways. The Town Center Common in the downtown is comprised of nearly 3.5 acres of open green space separated into three distinct sections: the South (managed by Amherst College), the Main (the largest section used most frequently for programming and large events) and the North Common. The North Common, which retains the more urban park-like setting with paved pathways, shade trees, benches, sculptural planters, Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) Fountain, and sitting walls/tree planting boxes, is the focus of this funding request. The North Common is also in closer proximity to the downtown cafés, restaurants and shops, experiencing heavy use from pedestrians and passer byes, picnicking, tourism and sightseeing, special events, and limited passive

recreation.

The commercial activity, variety of nearby housing options and extensive public transit service has helped the Town Common thrive. Because of the University and colleges, Amherst is a regional center for employment, services, and educational resources. In addition to the traditional level of visitation generated by the academic institutions and seasonal leaf-peeper 'tourism', Amherst is also becoming an increasingly important destination for cultural and historical tourism. The Town Center Common is a contributing landscape in the Central Business National Historic Register District, and although it has undergone various changes, its character and function has remained consistent throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Attractions such as the Emily Dickinson Museum; the Museum of Natural History and Meade Art Museum at Amherst College; the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art; and the National Yiddish Book Center, have become increasingly popular destinations for people of all ages—with many of these visitors drawn to the Common for its character and social and civic activity.

As Amherst Center has grown and expanded, the Town Common has been the dominant landscape feature, evolving from a swampy hayfield in the early 19th century to an open green lawn on the Main Common and an urban park on the North Common that includes a parking lot, paved walkways, formal seating and shade trees. The parking lot was a mid 20th century addition to accommodate the increased traffic and visitation to downtown.

The Common has undergone change throughout its history

Change is nothing new to the Common, in fact, it has been altered throughout its history to adapt to community needs, cultural trends and civic pride. The Amherst Ornamental Tree Association, formed in 1867, sought to improve the town's public spaces including major changes to the utilitarian Common, which had been used for military exercises, raising hay and grazing, and it contained a pond. The Association believed the Common should be a landscape of distinction, such that they drained and filled the pond, added pedestrian pathways, seating, water fountains and gas-fueled lights, and edged it with decorative fencing and shade trees. The domesticated look of the Common that remains to this day can be attributed to the work of the Ornamental Tree Association. Their improvements made it possible for the Common to serve as a site for community activities, including fairs, rallies, and a farmer's market, and has become one of the town's most beloved green spaces. During the "City Beautiful" movement the Common continued to change as the Town hired renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted to create a design for improving the central common. His plan, while never fully implemented, proposed a revised pattern of roadways, tree plantings, new pedestrian paths, and a formal "music stand" (bandstand).

The Amherst Preservation Plan (2005) emphasized that physical improvements to the Common should be a major short-term goal of the Historical Commission and community, to help fulfill past designs and meets the needs of the community. Recent improvements to the Main Common include burying utility lines, increased accessibility with new 14' wide sidewalks that also provide more opportunities for vendors and programming, additional seating and historic lights. These efforts were fully supported

by the community and were the first steps to adapt the Town Center Common to the 21st century and to achieve goals of the Master Plan and Economic Development plan that call for:

- ~ Increasing vibrancy of the downtown with improved amenities, higher density mixed use housing, expanded services and more commercial activity,
- ~ Encouraging community events and activities that draw people to the downtown, and
- ~ Preserving and enhancing Amherst's historic, cultural, and recreational resources

Plans for Improvement

The purpose of improving the North Common is to provide the community with a more flexible, programmable space that continues to respect the historic integrity of a landscape that is central to the civic and social activity of Amherst's downtown. The project will also address long standing issues with accessibility and safety related to the current physical conditions of the grass, sidewalks and open spaces on the N. Common. The health of current and new trees will be central to the design process.

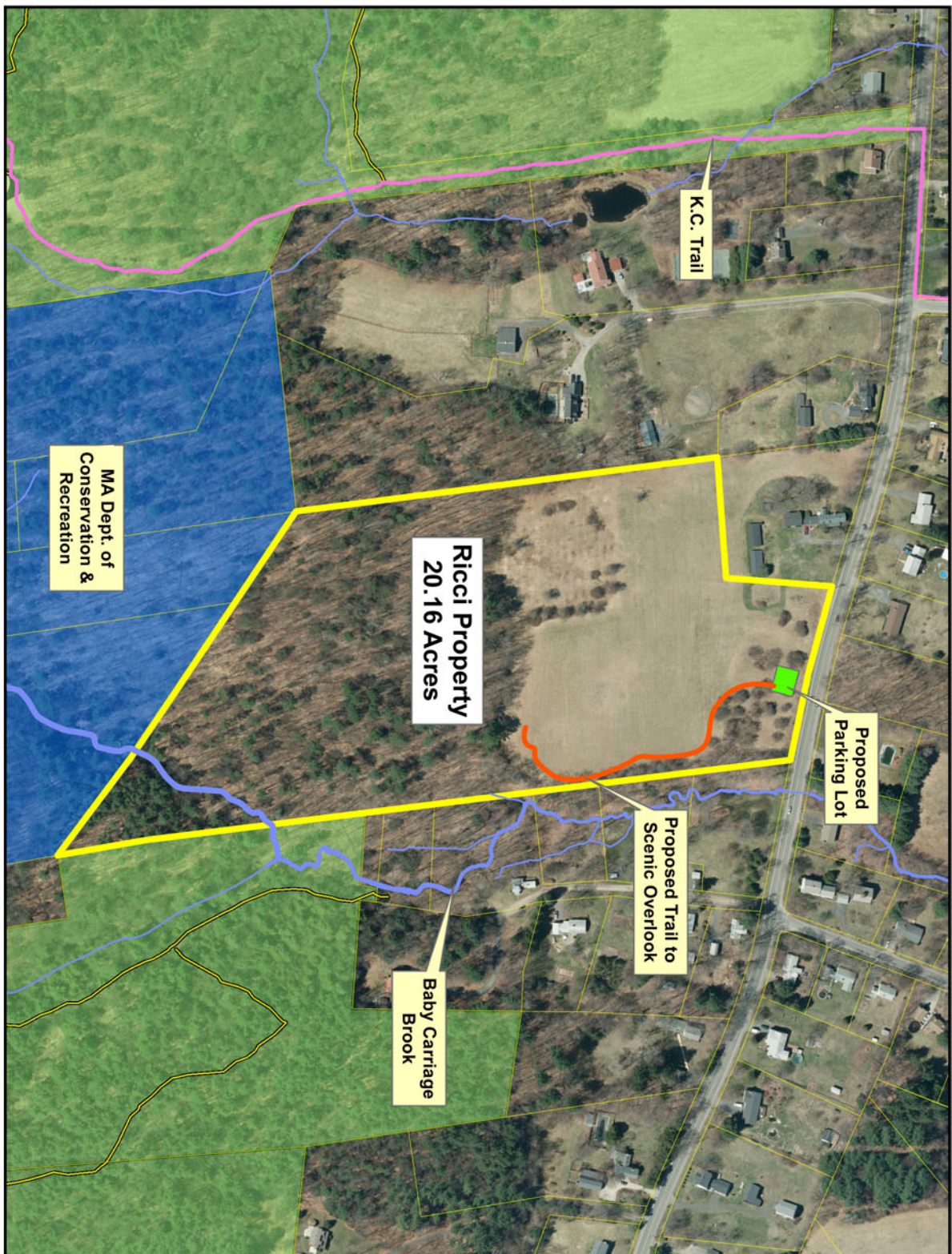
Improvements to the North Common are the next step in this process to meet the community's need for more flexible space in the Town Center that can accommodate small events, seasonal celebrations, and the increased daily activity of the downtown.

The Town has applied for a two year design/build PARC grant to hire a professional designer that will prepare appropriate plans. The first year of design will allow for extensive public outreach, involvement of the Historical Commission, LSSE Commission and other boards/committees, and it will help galvanize support the business community, including the newly formed Business Improvement District (BID). The BID would like to increase the visibility and community connections of its members with additional programming on the Town Common and through partnerships to beautify the downtown. Preliminary discussions with the BID indicate that they are willing to support the project either through a one-time donation, by supplying additional amenities and/or providing assistance with annual maintenance. The Town continues to work with the Chamber of Commerce, the Amherst Rotary Club and other organizations to develop partnerships that would contribute to the improvements of the North Common.

The conceptual designs included in this proposal show the North Common as an accessible space with wide generous sidewalks, plazas for special events (bicycle week, lighting of the holiday maple) and as informal gathering space with moveable tables and chairs, substantial bench seating to encourage more picnicking and socializing for visitors, students and business patrons, and an interpretive plaza around the WCTU fountain. These designs provide significantly more space and amenities to utilize the common as an integral outdoor space in the downtown. To ensure that the common will withstand additional foot traffic and use, plans will need to address site drainage, root compaction, durable turf, planting of up to 10 new shade trees in anticipation of future need, and interpretive plaques that show the public the evolution of the common.

Respectfully submitted:

Peter Jessop (Chair)	Housing Authority	549-1440
Mary Streeter (Vice Chair)	at Large	253-2441
Ellen Kosmer	at Large	253-7690
Stanley Ziomek	LSSE Commission	549-1717
Sandra Anderson	Planning Board	695-8969
Linda Faye	Historical Commission	
Paris Boice	Conservation Commission	687-2048
Michael Jacques	at Large	230-3230
Marilyn Blaustein	at Large	253-5963



LAND Grant: Ricci Acquisition Protecting the Holyoke Range

Town of Amherst



www.amherstma.gov

General Basemap

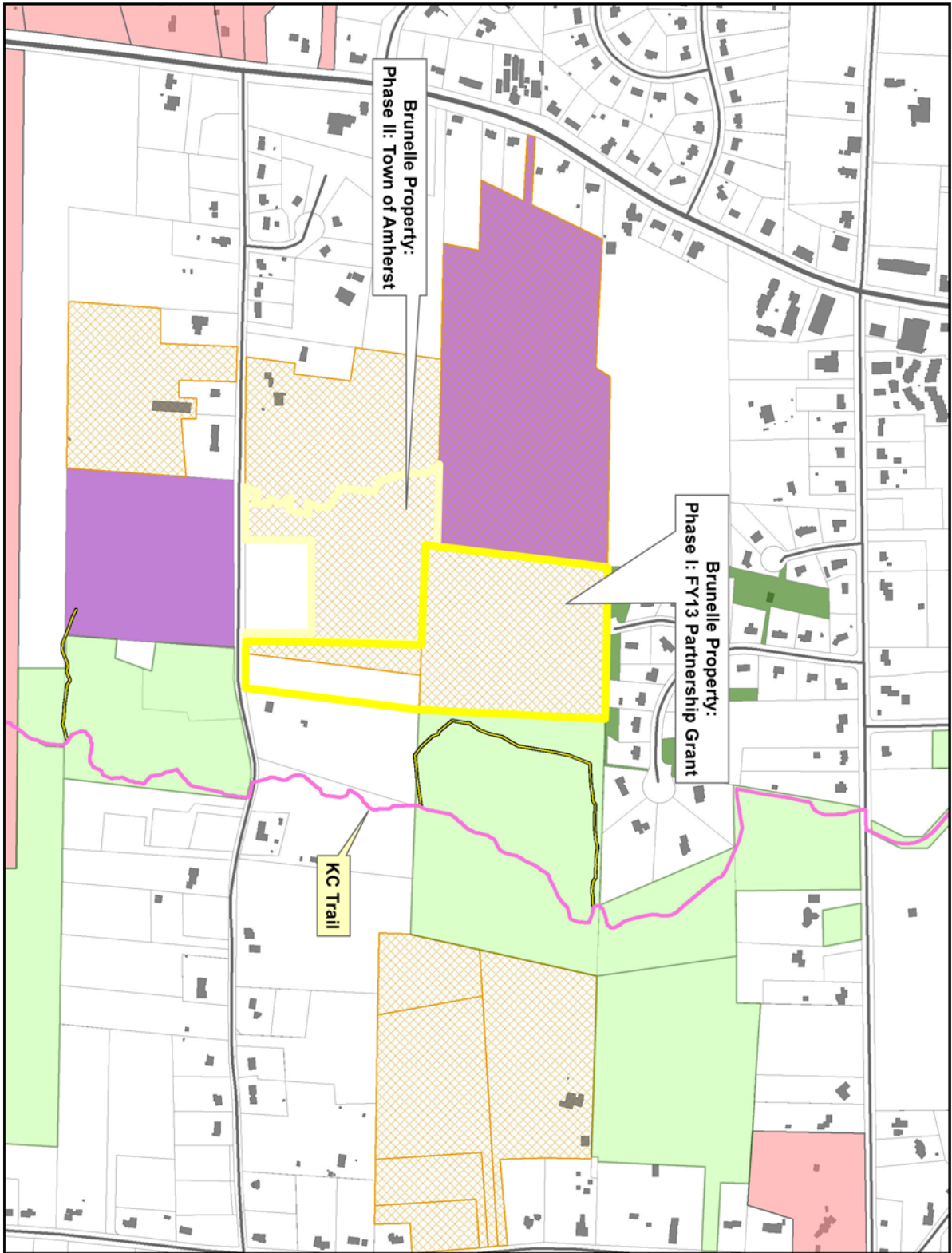
- Project Area
- Ricci Property
- Permanently Protected Lands
- Town-owned Conservation Lands
- MA Dept. of Conservation & Recreation
- Major Trails
- K.C. Trail
- Local and Literary Trails
- Local Trail



0 200 400
Feet

1 inch = 200 feet

Horizontal Datum: NAD 83
Zone 18N
Datum: NAD 83
Projection: UTM
Units: Meter
Scale: 1:250,000
Map Date: 2004
The Town of Amherst and its mapping contractors assume no legal responsibility for the information contained herein.



**Conservation
Partnership Grant:
Brunelle Acquisition**

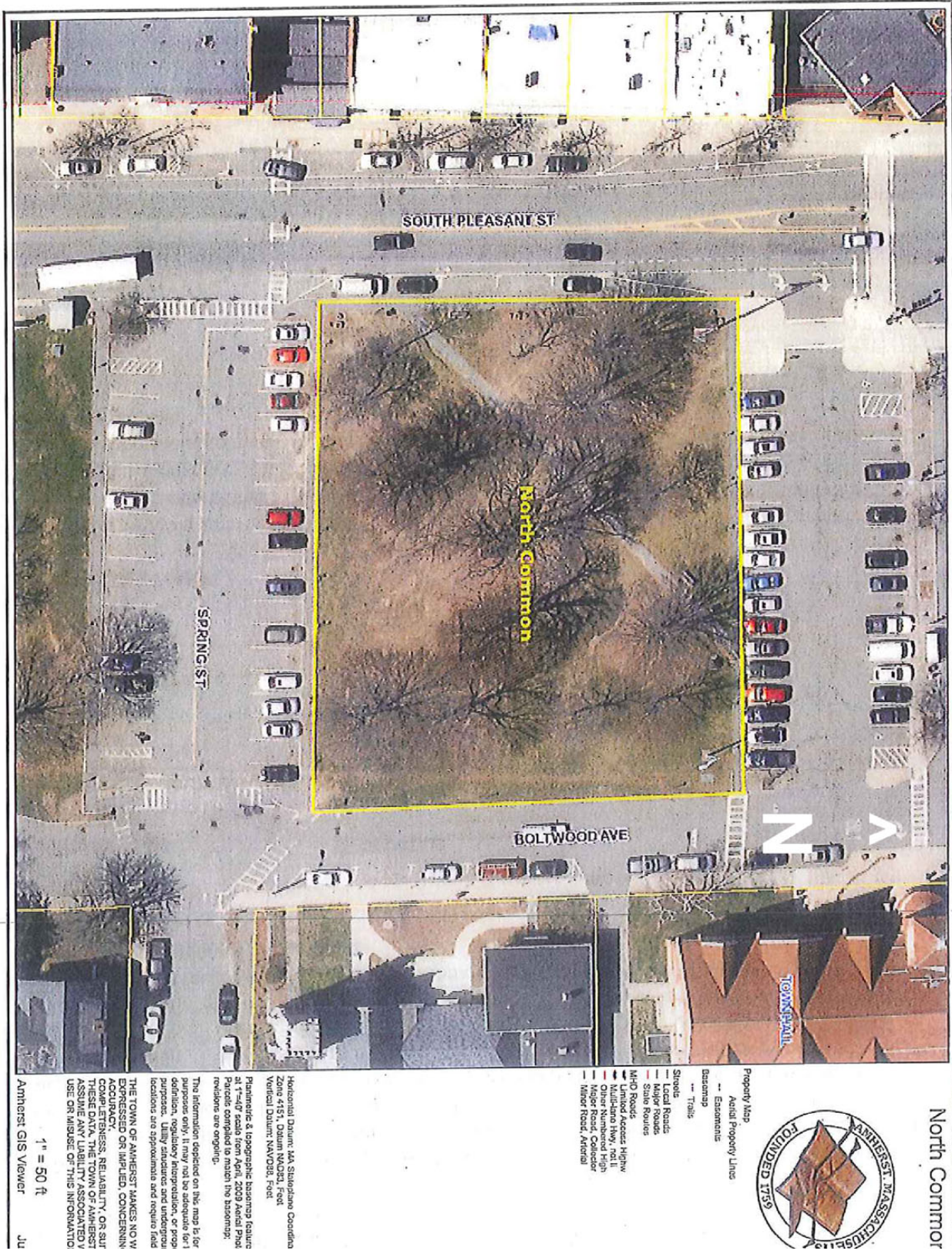


Protected Open Space

- Project Area**
 - Brunelle Property
- Permanently Protected**
 - Town Conservation Areas
 - Recreation Areas & Schools
 - Subdivision Open Space
- Partially Protected**
 - Chapter 61A (Agriculture)
 - Chapter 61B (Recreation)
- Major Trails**
 - Robert Frost Trail
 - Norwottuck Rail Trail
 - Literary Trail
 - Local Trail
- State Trail**
 - K.C. Trail
- Institutional Lands**
 - Amherst College
 - Hampshire College
 - Umass

Historical District, MA Statewide Consensus System,
Zone #151, Open WACHS, 1998
Permitted Building Footprint compiled at 7' x 40'
Aerial Photography from 2004
Parcel compiled through a "best effort" methodology to
determine the boundaries of the property. The boundaries
are not to be used for any other purpose.
The Town of Amherst and its mapping contractors assume
no responsibility for the information contained herein.

0 400 800
Feet
1 inch = 400 feet



North Common